

RELI 40603: 060 -- SENIOR SEMINAR IN RELIGION, SPRING 2007

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Course Description

This course will explore the nature and function of religion through close reading and discussion of selected major works in the academic study of religion.

You are expected to attend all classes, and to read (and think about) the books before each class. The reading takes time and commitment. Some of this reading and thinking will be difficult, but we think it is worth the effort. Active participation through presentations, journaling, and discussion are central to the success of this seminar. We want to enhance your ability to think carefully and articulate reasons for your positions while engaged in civil and critical dialogue; one important result will be a better understanding of both your own and others' views about the nature and function of religion.

Attendance and Participation

You will be assessed on preparedness for class and the frequency, relevance, and insight of your comments in discussion. This grade is not based merely on your showing up or on how often you speak. We need you to bring both body and mind to the classroom. This means listening to others, hearing their comments and, when appropriate, responding to others' comments instead of only trying to make your own voice heard.

Attendance is crucial; thus students who miss more than two weeks without a legitimate excuse will fail the course. If you have a problem affecting your course participation, or must miss class, please let us know as soon as possible.

Essays

Another course aim will be to help refine your reading and writing skills. You will write two short essays during the semester, critically analyzing and responding to the assigned reading. The goal is to develop a carefully articulated and defended thesis that presents an evaluation of some strengths and weaknesses of a text, offering a balanced judgment in light of the evidence you present (see handout “Writing Critical Essays”). Dates when papers are due will be given to you at the first class meeting. Essays should be about 1250 words (typed, double spaced, numbered and stapled pages, with the word count at the end). Please use consistent and adequate internal references (MLA or Turabian). Also, you must turn in with the paper a 100 word précis. Turn in one copy each to Drs. Rodriguez-Plate and Lahutsky by **5:00 p.m. the Tuesday preceding the class** for which the paper is written. Except for extraordinary circumstances, papers received after the deadline will be penalized two letter grades. After 5:00 p.m. Thursday, no papers will be accepted. Finally, you should bring a copy of your paper to class. Be prepared to state your paper’s thesis/overall argument at the beginning of class, perhaps by using the précis you developed earlier.

Computer Journals

On those weeks when you do not write a paper, you will also post a computer journal entry responding to the week’s reading (recommended length 250-400 words). These will express a personal opinion directly related to specific issues and/or passages in the text. Your entry will be strengthened by reference to particular passages. Formal citation is not necessary in this case, but do include page number references to the readings as much as possible. Your journal entry must be posted **by noon on Tuesday**. Once during the semester you will be responsible for summarizing your fellow students’ entries to begin our class discussion; the date you are presenting will also be given to you at the first class meeting.

Summarizers should:

- (1) bring a copy of the week’s entries to class;
- (2) isolate main ideas and issues in any given week’s set of entries;
- (3) avoid giving lengthy quotations from the journal entries; re-cast in your own words.

(4) have at least one question -- inspired by the entries -- ready to open class discussion.

(5) use no more than ten minutes for your summary.

The journal entry will be posted by noon on Tues. to eCollege, RELI 40603

Consult the eCollege bookmark (yes, a mark for a real book) for how to log in to eCollege. Go to the course, RELI 40603. The units are listed by author name or topic on the left side of the screen. Click on “Posting” and the link will appear. The best plan would be to draft your posting in a Word document and then paste the text into the space on eCollege. While you will not—strictly speaking—be graded on the grammar, spelling, etc., of the postings, you must say something that makes sense. You are more likely to write sensible sentences when working in the normal format.

End-of-Semester Paper

Your final assignment will be an essay describing your own view of the nature and function of religion in light of your critical assessments of the semester’s readings. These papers should be approximately 2500 words in length and will be due by 5 p.m. the Friday before exam week.

Course Grade

Your course grade will be calculated as follows:

2 essays: 20 % each;

Journal entries: 15%;

Class Participation and Summary of journal entries: 20 %;

Final essay: 25%

TCU Policies

For information on TCU’s Academic Conduct and Disability Policy, point your browser at: <http://www.studentaffairs.tcu.edu/handbook/academic.htm>

And Finally...

To help you understand how your grade is determined, you can be sure:

- (1) you will be notified of your computer journal grade and participation grade approximately every four weeks;
- (2) your in-class essays will be graded and returned with comments within one week;
- (3) both professors are happy to meet with you at any point in the semester.

Class	Reading
17 Jan.	Course intro and Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System.”
24 Jan.	Friedrich Schleiermacher, <i>On Religion</i>, see handout for pages
31 Jan.	Ron Grimes, <i>Deeply Into the Bone</i>, 1-14, 88-116, 121-25, 127-38, 144-48, 156-72, 191-214
7 Feb.	J. Z. Smith, “Sacred Persistence”; W. Graham, “Scripture as Spoken Word”; K. Folkert, “The ‘Canons’ of Scripture”
14 Feb.	C. McDannell, <i>Material Christianity</i>, 1-16
21 Feb.	Peter Berger, <i>The Sacred Canopy</i>, 3-101.
28 Feb.	Berger, <i>The Sacred Canopy</i>, 105-71, 179-85
7 March	Rita Gross, <i>Feminism and Religion</i>, 1-148
21 March	Gross, <i>Feminism and Religion</i>, 149-247
28 March	Anthony Pinn, <i>Terror and Triumph</i>, 1-132
4 April	Pinn, <i>Terror and Triumph</i>, 133-200
11 April	Don Cupitt, <i>Emptiness and Brightness</i>, 1-120
18 April	Diana Eck, <i>Encountering God</i>, ix-117
25 April	Eck, <i>Encountering God</i>, 118-231
2 May	